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POPULISM IN LOUISIANA DURING THE NINETIES

The populist movement in Louisiana during the nineties derives its chief importance from its effects, not only upon political developments in Louisiana, but, more or less directly, upon political developments in other southern states. This was due to complications growing out of the presence of the negro, particularly the use that was made of his vote in the course of the struggle between the populists and the democrats for control of the state government. Judged solely by election returns, the movement was comparatively unimportant; the greatest success ever won by the party at the polls was the election of a few members to the state legislature.

Populism everywhere was a product of hard times, the principal cause for which, so far as Louisiana was concerned, was the depression in the cotton industry. The stimulus of high prices during the decade immediately following the war caused planters and farmers throughout the lower south to give almost exclusive attention to the cultivation of cotton. Over-production resulted, and, beginning about the middle seventies, prices declined until by the late eighties or early nineties they fell far below the margin of profitable cultivation. The low-water mark was reached in Louisiana in 1894, when the general average farm price for cotton was four and three-tenths cents per pound.¹ Here, as elsewhere in this region, crop diversification had not been practiced to any great extent, and cash capital was lacking, since the profits of the flush years had been expended in repairing the wastes of war, in restocking farms and plantations, and

¹ *Yearbook of the United States department of agriculture*, 1895, 536.

in clearing and preparing new lands for cultivation.² The Louisiana business man probably felt the pinch of hard times less than the small farmer in the hill parishes of the state, but he too was affected by the low price of the leading staple.³ Both naturally felt the influence of nation-wide business depressions, particularly of the panic of 1893.⁴ Besides these, the people of the state suffered a series of natural calamities between the years 1891 and 1896, inclusive, that certainly added to the prevailing distress and discontent which made the times favorable for the rise and development of political movements expected to afford relief. Crevasses in the years 1891 and 1892, especially those of the late spring of 1892, resulted in overflows in the valleys of the Mississippi and Red rivers that destroyed property valued at several millions of dollars. Several thousands of people were made homeless and reduced to the point of starvation, crops were destroyed, stock was drowned, and many of the overflowed lands rendered unproductive for years.⁵ The drought of the spring and summer of 1896, which was the last of the misfortunes of this period, caused an almost total loss of crops in the hill parishes. At the same time charbon appeared in several localities, in many cases taking off all the work animals the farmers owned.⁶

The farmer's alliance, or the farmer's union, to give it the earlier name it went by in Louisiana, spread into the state from Texas, where it originated about 1876.⁷ Here, as elsewhere, its original object was to organize and enlighten the farmers, promote better agricultural methods, and make farm life more attractive.⁸ By the year 1888 it was reported strong in north

² The southern agricultural situation during the years under review is treated in the *Twelfth census of the United States, 1900, agriculture*, 6: 407. The *Times-Democrat* (New Orleans), September 4, 1892, contains an official cotton crop report by Secretary Heston, of the New Orleans cotton exchange, which deals with the same subject.

³ *Ibid.*, September 1, 1896.

⁴ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1896.

⁵ *Ibid.*, September 1, 1892.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 15, 25, and 29, 1896.

⁷ *World almanac*, 1891 (New York, 1891-), 93; *Harper's encyclopaedia of United States history*, 3: 311.

⁸ The following tribute to the alliance was copied from the *Monroe Bulletin* (date not given), and printed in the *Times-Democrat*, September 7, 1896: "The greatest

Louisiana, and active in politics, though not as a distinct political organization. The farmers at this time were for the most part staunch democrats, their political activities being confined to the support of such candidates of that party for state offices as would subscribe to the principles of the alliance. A typical farmer's alliance platform of this period, that of De Soto parish, is of interest on account of the comprehensive legislation demanded of the state and national governments. In making demands for immediate steps to prevent foreign non-residents from acquiring land titles in the United States, for laws to prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural products, and for the enactment of a new commerce law, the De Soto farmers anticipated, in substance at least, three demands of the Ocala platform of 1890.⁹ Other demands were for a law that would give a better labor system, for the sale of all public lands in small tracts to actual settlers on easy terms, for a provision that all lands held for speculation be valued for taxation at the same rates as they were offered for sale to cash purchasers, and for the abolition of the convict contract system. They were already committed to inflation, their plank upon this subject reading as follows: "We demand the rapid extinguishment of the public debt by operating the mints to their fullest capacity in the coinage of gold and silver, and tendering the same without discrimination to all public creditors." The propriety of parishes buying lands sold for taxes, and holding them for actual settlers, was suggested.¹⁰

The preliminary steps in the formation of the people's party in Louisiana were taken in Winn parish during the congressional campaign of 1890. Attention has already been called to the

and best educator of the farmers was the Alliance, which was founded on the broad principles of humanity and justice. It was a noble order, and its purpose and platforms pure and lofty. It was a friend of the producing classes, and led them up to a higher plane of enlightenment. It taught the farmers the benefits of association, and gave them lessons of far-reaching importance. Many a thrifty farmer owes his salvation from debt and penury to the holy teachings of the Alliance. Women and children were benefitted as well as the men. It contributed to the social pleasures and broke the monotony of farm life. Peerless, grand, beautiful order. How we would like to hear its songs again. How we would like to see the bright faces and the hearty welcomes of the brethren in council, sweet as the 'dews of Hermon and the oil that ran down on Aaron's beard.' "

⁹ The Ocala platform is printed in the *World almanac*, 1891, 93-94.

¹⁰ *Times-Democrat*, April 18, 1888.

earlier political activities of the farmers in north Louisiana. Prior to the nominations, the alliance men of the fourth congressional district, then composed of the parishes of Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, De Soto, Grant, Natchitoches, Rapides, Red River, Sabine, Vernon, Webster, and Winn, were backing a candidate who had the support of a majority of the delegates to the district nominating convention. Through trickery he was deprived of nomination, much to the anger and disgust of his supporters. The Winn parish delegation bolted the convention, went home, organized, and sent Hardy L. Brian to the leading alliance men in most of the parishes in the district in order to secure delegates to a convention at Natchitoches. This convention met and nominated T. J. Guice, of De Soto parish, lecturer of the state farmer's alliance, as an independent candidate for congress to oppose the nominee of the district convention. In the election Guice received only 5,167 votes to 16,442 polled by the regular candidate,¹¹ but the foundation for the people's party had been laid. During the campaign the farmer's alliance men of Winn parish bought out the only newspaper in the parish, the *Winn Parish Democrat*, and began the publication of the *Comrade* at Winnfield, the parish seat, which at that time was twenty-eight miles from a steamboat landing and thirty-five miles from a railroad. H. L. Brian, a man of energy and unusual ability, was chosen editor. He was the leader of the people's party in Louisiana, and, besides editing the chief newspapers of the party, served first as secretary and later as chairman of its state central committee.

By the time of the state campaign of 1892, the people's party was fully organized with a ticket in the field. Doubtless these developments were influenced by the Cincinnati convention of 1891, where Louisiana was represented by H. L. Brian of Winn parish and I. J. Mills of Calcasieu. At this point it may be well to mention some of the aims of the Louisiana people's party. As will appear from time to time, the party naturally adopted nearly all, if not all, of the principles of the national organization of which they formed a part, but particularly in the southern states they were interested in bringing about many purely local reforms. Among these may be mentioned the reform of the con-

¹¹ *World almanac*, 1891, 290.

vention system for nominating candidates for state offices. Delegates to such were apportioned among the parishes in proportion to the vote cast in previous elections. In the "swamp" or "black" parishes, it was customary to count the negro vote, never actually cast, in making these apportionments, and this enabled the aforesaid parishes to control the "white" or "hill" parishes. Another reform was in regard to the appointive power of the governor, the claim being made that offices went to the centers of greatest political influence, the "black" parishes, as rewards for faithful service, and that this worked to the detriment of the "white" or "hill" parishes. Besides, the governor was enabled to build up a strong machine, and thus perpetuate his authority.¹²

The great issue before the voters of the state in the election grew out of a movement, dating from the year 1890, for the renewal of the charter of the Louisiana state lottery company, which was to expire January 1, 1894.¹³ Louisiana legislatures are chosen quadrennially, consequently the one elected in 1892 would be called upon to take action upon the application of the lottery company. The campaign was unusually exciting, for the election was regarded as of the greatest importance. The democratic party split into two factions, known as the anti-lottery and the regulars, with Murphy J. Foster and Samuel D. McEnery as their respective candidates for governor. Dissensions of some kind, apparently foreign to the great question of the day, had also divided the republicans into two groups, each with a candidate for governor. The election, held April 19, resulted in a victory for the anti-lottery forces, their candidate for governor having a plurality of over 30,000 votes. The people's party candidate for governor, R. L. Tannehill, sheriff of Winn parish and treasurer of the state farmer's alliance, received 9,792 votes, carrying the parishes of Catahoula, Grant, Vernon, and Winn.¹⁴ These figures should not be taken as an indication of the numerical strength of the party at the time, however, for the state farmer's alliance had made a fusion agreement with the anti-lottery dem-

¹² For most of the facts concerning the origin and early development of the people's party in Louisiana I am indebted to Mr. H. L. Brian, of Verda, Louisiana.

¹³ Alcée Fortier, *History of Louisiana* (New York, 1904), 4: 220-225.

¹⁴ *Biennial report of the secretary of state of the state of Louisiana to the general assembly, 1894-1896*, 178-179.

ocrats, and this divided their vote.¹⁵ During the election the people's party elected to the state senate B. F. Brian, a farmer from Grant parish.¹⁶

With the state election over, political attention in Louisiana was centered upon the approaching presidential campaign. There was great activity upon the part of the new party men. They sent a delegation to Omaha, Nebraska, that assisted at the nomination of James B. Weaver and James G. Field as the candidates of the national people's party.¹⁷ In the early fall both candidates made a tour of the south, Field visiting and speaking at several places in Louisiana.¹⁸ In the people's party parishes there was great enthusiasm for the Weaver-Field ticket, which, since Weaver had served in the union army and Field in the confederate, was referred to as a union of the blue and the gray. The attention that the democrat press gives to the movement at this time is evidence of its growing importance. Many of the small white farmers in the hill parishes of north Louisiana, long regarded as the democratic stronghold, were leaving the ranks of the old party and casting their lot with the new. Something must be done to put an end to the schism. Ridicule was resorted to, and General Weaver's military and political records were aired in order to discountenance him in the eyes of the voters. It was charged that the people of Tennessee, where he had held an important command during the late war, considered him the most bitter hater of the south in the whole union army, and as for his political record, he had been democrat, know-nothing, republican, and everything else he could be, in order to get votes and hold office.¹⁹

The Arkansas election was to take place September 5, and as the time approached, the democrats of Louisiana began to show a great interest, not unmixed with anxiety, in the outcome. Populism was known to be strong there and it was felt that the

¹⁵ Statements by Mr. H. L. Brian and others.

¹⁶ Mr. H. L. Brian informs me that three members of the party were also elected to the lower house, but they were probably candidates on the fusion ticket, and hence classed as democrats in the report of the secretary of state. *Biennial report of the secretary of state of the state of Louisiana to the general assembly, 1892-1894*, contains a table showing the composition of the legislature.

¹⁷ *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), July 3 and 5, 1892.

¹⁸ *Times-Democrat*, September 10, 1892.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, September 4, 1892.

vote would show not only the strength of the new party in Arkansas, but, to a certain extent, that it would afford some indication of its strength in the south as a whole. If it polled a large vote, the third party would become a factor in the November election, and the democrats would have to exert themselves to the utmost.²⁰ When the fateful day arrived, the official returns gave the election to the Arkansas democrats, but the joy of the Louisiana democrats over the result was tempered somewhat by news that during the contest in the neighboring state there had been a tacit understanding between the people's party and the republicans. This was regarded as an unfavorable development.²¹

On September 17, 1892, Weaver and Field issued, from Pensacola, Florida, what was called their letter of acceptance by a democratic newspaper of Louisiana; this paper charged that the letter had not been promulgated earlier because its authors wished to delay until they could make practical acquaintance with the wrongs suffered by the people of the south. The wrongs set forth in this document were, in substance, that the people were in poverty and that their substance was being devoured by heartless monopolists, that labor was largely unemployed, and that where work was obtainable the wages were unremunerative. The two great parties, it was set forth, were everywhere under the control of the great monopoly and money centers, and they had manifested an utter disregard for the people. The last point, which there is plenty of evidence to prove was true in Louisiana, called attention to the people's lack of confidence in the integrity of election judges.²²

The letter was evidently a vote-catching device planned by the two candidates of the national people's party, who saw in the southern political situation an excellent opportunity to break the "solid south" with profit to themselves. Just what its immediate effects were, besides drawing the fire of the democratic press, it would be difficult to say. One thing that is certain is that heavy inroads were being made in the ranks of the democrats of Louisiana by the third party men. The democrats were torn by dissension, and hardly in a position to resist dis-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, September 5, 1892.

²¹ *Ibid.*, September 7, 1892.

²² *Ibid.*, September 20, 1892.

integration. "We are not in a condition now to permit internal dissention," warned the *Baton Rouge Advocate*. "The breaches must be closed and strengthened preparatory to a vigorous assault all along the line. An active, enthusiastic campaign must be at once inaugurated in order to carry the principles of Democracy victorious over the combined assaults of the Republicans and Populists. . . Oily-tongued orators, in many cases the paid agents of the Republican party have for months been circulating among the unsophisticated and more credulous classes, preaching their heresies and teaching the people that if Weaver is elected President money may be had for the asking, transportation on the railroad trains will be practically free, the laboring man will be transferred from his present position and placed upon a throne of power, while lakes filled with molasses, whose shores are fringed with buckwheat cakes, and islands of Jersey butter rise here and there above the surface, will be a concomitant of every farm. 'The forty-acres-and-a-mule' promises of the reconstruction era pale into insignificance beside the glowing pictures of prosperity promised by the average Populist orator to those who support Weaver. These issues must be met. It will not do to simply pooh pooh their absurdity.'" ²³

If literally true, this portrayal of the political situation throws interesting light upon Louisiana campaign methods, and, at the same time, stands as a sad commentary upon the intelligence of people who could be influenced by such promises. Much of it is, of course, pure exaggeration, but certain actual facts were pointed out. The new party had become a political force to be reckoned with. Its propaganda was being spread by speakers and by means of the press. But by far the most important thing alluded to was the understanding between the republicans and the people's party; this tendency to form a combination with the minority party was a characteristic of populism everywhere. In Louisiana the understanding was as yet merely tacit. Before it could very well develop into a formal alliance breaches in republican ranks had to be closed. There were two factions, known as the Leonard and Warmouth factions, each claiming to be the duly recognized representative of republicanism in the state. The struggle between them was exceedingly bitter. Two members of the republican national committee came to New

²³ Quoted in *Times-Democrat*, October 3, 1892.

Orleans and made a vain attempt to restore harmony between them.²⁴ Finally, they reached an agreement among themselves²⁵ and the way was clear for the alliance with the third party men. It is not clear which took the initiative but negotiations were carried on for some time. On October 15, 1892, there was published a proposition for fusion that was pending at that date,²⁶ but the actual agreement was not signed until the night of October 20. It provided for a combination electoral and congressional ticket. In the conduct of the fusion campaign every honorable means was to be used by each party to elect the entire ticket, "both the presidential electors and Congressional candidates, but when elected they shall not be under any pledge, one to the other, but shall in all matters stand relatively to each other the same as if elected by their respective parties, without the assistance of the other party to the contract."²⁷

At the time this agreement was made public the campaign committees of the two parties each issued an address to the voters of the state. That of the people's party called attention to the baneful influence of monopolies, the hard lot of the common people, and the corrupt alliance entered into between those who usurped too great a share of the profits of the producers of wealth and professional politicians, which, it was stated, had destroyed the usefulness of both the two great political parties. It was charged that the state electoral machinery was in the hands of the democratic politicians, and that the republicans alone could not secure a fair count of the vote. By entering into the fusion agreement, it was asserted, the people's party was merely fighting the democrats with their own methods. In concluding, an appeal was made to the voters to have the manhood to assert their rights, not to let the scarecrow of negro domination longer drive them to the democratic wigwam, and to rally to the standard of the people's party and elect the fusion ticket as a rebuke to "the Democrats in their strength, and the Republican party in its weakness. May Louisiana break the 'solid south' and greet our great toiling brethren of the North and West with the cheering hope of industrial reform in the near future. A re-

²⁴ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1892.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, October 6, 1892.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1892.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, October 21, 1892.

form bringing with it the liberation of our producers of wealth from the dangers which threaten their further enslavement. A reform which will restore our government to what it was intended to be, 'one of the people, for the people, and by the people.' " The republican address merely announced the agreement, stated that it had been entered into against the common enemy, after due deliberation, and on the advice of national leaders, in order to secure a fair election, and it called upon the republican congressional district committees to give it their support.²⁸

In the presidential election the democrats carried the state, a popular vote of 87,922 being cast for Cleveland. Weaver, the people's party candidate, led Harrison, the republican candidate, by a single vote, the former receiving 13,282, and the latter, 13,281.²⁹ The democrats also elected their whole congressional ticket.³⁰

The people's party-republican fusion lasted through the congressional campaign of 1894,³¹ the state campaign in the spring of 1896, up to the national free silver campaign in the fall of 1896. It created a formidable opposition for the democrats, and introduced a particularly disturbing factor: the negro, politically suppressed since reconstruction days, was now, owing to the trend of developments, courted for his vote. Fears of negro domination began to be expressed. The more responsible of the democrats were, naturally, among the first to take the alarm,³² and as the time for the state election of 1896 drew near, they became convinced that then was the time for a settlement. Accordingly, the democratic legislature prepared a suffrage amendment to the constitution for submission to the voters. This, in addition to the usual age, state, parish, and ward or precinct qualifications, contained an educational clause, with a property qualification as an alternative. It was made the chief plank in the party platform. It was felt that a democratic victory at the polls, without other guarantees, would protect the white supremacy for only the next four years, but that if the negro won, if he defeated the amendment, it would require a revolution to

²⁸ *Times-Democrat*, October 21, 1892.

²⁹ Edward Stanwood, *History of the presidency* (Boston, 1898), 517.

³⁰ *Daily Picayune*, November 10, 1892.

³¹ The democrats repeated their success of 1892 in this election. See *World almanac*, 1895, 402-403.

³² *Times-Democrat*, April 4, 1896.

wrest it from him in 1900.³³ Ex-Governor McEnery was of the opinion that the politicians were afraid to thwart the negro's caprice, and that "there is not in the whole state, with few exceptions, the moral courage to insist upon the adoption of the proposed constitutional amendment regulating suffrage." He also stated that "if we are to have peace and quiet in this state, if we are to have a well organized government, if we are to have a virtuous society and intelligent, growing, progressive spirit, we will be compelled to restrict the right of suffrage to its intelligent exercise. The negro today is the dominant power in this state."³⁴

The democrats nominated Governor Foster for reëlection. The fusionists put a full state ticket in the field, their candidate for governor being a republican, John N. Pharr, at one time a steamboat captain, and later temperance lecturer and planter.³⁵ They were not the only reformers participating in the spring campaign and election. Business and professional men of New Orleans, disgusted by exposures of graft and corruption due to ring politics, organized the citizen's league, and put up a ticket, headed by Walter C. Flower for mayor, in opposition to that of the regular democrats, then in control of the city government.³⁶ This caused the democrats of the state at large some concern, as did also the action of the sugar planters, who joined the republicans in 1896 because they feared that a national democratic victory would mean the end of tariff protection on sugar.³⁷

The campaign was marked by much disorder and some bloodshed, the most serious outbreaks occurring in the parish of St. Landry, a strong populist center. Many of these grew out of registration troubles. It is alleged that after the sheriff failed to appear on account of threats against his life, republicans and populists took possession of the town of Washington, on April 3, and "went through the form of registering the negroes." Counter action was taken by organized bands of white men, presumably democrats, who, under the name of "Regulators," undertook to maintain white supremacy by whipping and killing

³³ *Ibid.*, April 5, 1896.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, April 13, 1896.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, April 21, 1896.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, April 2, 1896.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, April 9, September 21, 1896.

negroes in an effort to intimidate them. A few days after the affair at Washington, one of these bands met at a place called Grand Prairie, a number of negroes on their way to Opelousas to register for the election. An encounter took place in which two negroes were killed, several wounded, and many whipped. The situation became so serious that state troops had to be sent to maintain order in the parish.³⁸

The state election, which took place April 21, was one of the most disorderly ever held in Louisiana. Charges of fraud, intimidation at the polls, and ballot-box stuffing were too numerous to mention. Twice the militia had to be called out to put down riots.³⁹ The democrats won as usual, but with greatly reduced majorities as compared with former elections. The legislature chosen, which was composed of thirty-six senators and ninety-eight representatives, contained two independents, two independent democrats, thirteen republicans, and eighteen populists, two of the latter being in the upper and sixteen in the lower chamber.⁴⁰ The citizen's league carried the New Orleans city election, and sent nineteen members of the organization to the legislature. True to ex-Governor McEnery's prediction, the proposed suffrage amendment was defeated, and by methods characterized as disgraceful.⁴¹

One half the populists elected were classified as planters, seven were farmers, one was a lumber manufacturer, and one was a teacher. Eleven were native born citizens of Louisiana, four claimed Georgia as their place of birth, two were born in Alabama, one each in North Carolina and Tennessee, and one in Ireland. They were chosen from the parishes of Winn, St. Landry, Catahoula, Natchitoches, Sabine, Union, Jackson, East Baton Rouge, Claiborne, Lincoln, Grant, Vernon, and Acadia,⁴² located for the most part in the northwestern, western, and southwestern sections of the state. These were the regions of great populist influence, but a heavy vote was polled by the party

³⁸ *Times-Democrat*, April 8, 10, 1896.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, April 23, 25, 28, 1896.

⁴⁰ *Biennial report of the secretary of state of the state of Louisiana to the general assembly*, 1894-1896, 6-13.

⁴¹ *Times-Democrat*, April 25, 1896.

⁴² *Biennial report of the secretary of state of the state of Louisiana to the general assembly*, 1894-1896, 6-13.

in some of the Florida parishes.⁴³ Their great stronghold was in the hill parishes of northwestern Louisiana, peopled mainly by small white farmers. This, it will be recalled, was the region where the farmer's alliance had been particularly strong, and where a heavy vote had been cast for the people's party candidate for governor in the state election of 1892. Populism never gained much of a foothold in the cotton parishes of the delta, or in the sugar parishes; and it was never strong in the cities.⁴⁴

By far the most serious situation growing out of the election concerned the governorship. The election officials gave out that Governor Foster had been reëlected by a large majority, but the fusionists absolutely refused to accept this result, claiming that it had been accomplished by means of false returns. They honestly believed that Pharr had carried the state, and they determined to seat him at all costs. Passions were at fever heat, and, except in times of war, it is doubtful if the people of Louisiana have ever been confronted with a graver crisis than that which developed during the three weeks following the election. The difficulty had to be settled, but how? The constitution provided no method. A grand jury undertook to investigate the election, but serious objections were raised to this mode of procedure, and it was abandoned.⁴⁵ Pharr's supporters maintained that the state legislature was the proper tribunal for the trial of the case, and that in exercising the functions of a court it had authority to go behind the election returns.⁴⁶ After considerable wrangling, they appear to have had their way, in part at least, for it was decided to leave the matter to the determination of the legislature just elected. This convened early in May; a bitter struggle then took place in the state capitol at Baton Rouge, while the city was filled with the armed partisans of both candidates. The citizen's league men from New Orleans split over the issue, one of them taking the lead in the effort to seat Pharr. The latter's followers were given an opportunity to present their case, but the legislature in joint session decided, by a vote of 87 to 74, that it did not have authority to go behind the election returns, and Governor Foster was declared reëlec-

⁴³ *Daily Picayune*, April 25, 1896.

⁴⁴ Statements by Mr. H. L. Brian and others confirm these conclusions.

⁴⁵ *Times-Democrat*, April 29, 30, 1896.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, May 3, 1896.

ted.⁴⁷ This decision, while far from being satisfactory to the fusionists, was, fortunately, accepted by them. Perhaps the strength of the armed forces arrayed against them had something to do with their acquiescence.

As has been seen, many citizens had already felt, prior to the state campaign and election, that it was necessary to eliminate the ignorant and vicious,—the ignorant negroes in particular, of course,—from politics; the excesses of April and May made them determined to do so. The press of the state for the most part came out strongly in favor of such action. Changes in the fundamental law of the state were required if such an end was to be attained. The constitutional method of amendment had just been tried without success, owing to the influence of the politicians. In order to avoid such influences in the future the legislature passed an act, approved July 7, 1896, providing for submitting to the voters of the state, for their approval or rejection, at an election to take place on the second Tuesday of January, 1898, a proposition for holding a convention at the city of New Orleans, on the second Tuesday of February, 1898, and giving it full authority to draw up and adopt a new state constitution without submitting it to the people. The convention was to consist of one hundred and thirty-four delegates, thirty-six of whom were to be chosen at large and ninety-eight in the parishes and representative districts. Certain prohibitions were to be placed upon the convention. It could not introduce into the new instrument of government any provision affecting the bonded indebtedness of the state, or of local political units, except under carefully specified conditions. It could not alter the existing levee system, change the terms of office of assemblymen, judges, or similar officers, or change in any way the constitutional prohibitions on lotteries. The act also contained directions on voting for delegates, and the oath to be administered to members of the convention.⁴⁸

A new electoral law, likewise a product of the election—it may represent a sort of a compromise between the democrats and the opposition—was approved two days later, on July 9, 1896. In its twenty-five pages it made provision for the use of the Austra-

⁴⁷ *Times-Democrat*, May 15, 1896; *Times Picayune* (New Orleans), March 12, 1918.

⁴⁸ *Acts of the state of Louisiana*, 1896, no. 52.

lian ballot, in effect for the first time in Louisiana during the presidential election of 1896, and framed regulations regarding notices of elections, officials at the polls, the canvass and count of ballots, ballot-boxes, the delivery of ballots, and the giving of information to voters. Penalties were provided for infractions, and for having intoxicating liquors in polling places.⁴⁹

The state election of 1896 marked the end of the republican-populist alliance in Louisiana. The presidential campaign in the fall of that year found most of the populists in hearty coöperation with the democrats. A common candidate for president and mutual interest in inflation made this a perfectly natural attitude. The populists of southwest Louisiana were reported as being in favor of Bryan and his free silver platform early in September,⁵⁰ but it was a very difficult matter to win over the men of north Louisiana, where memories of their treatment at the hands of the democrats in the spring still rankled in the minds of many. It required prolonged negotiations to arrange an agreement, but one was eventually reached at Baton Rouge, September 25, 1896. The democrats pledged themselves to a fair election, and conceded the populists one-half of the presidential electors.⁵¹ It is probable that pressure from national populist headquarters was an important, if not the most important, influence back of this agreement.⁵²

There was a new party in the field during the fall campaign and election in Louisiana, but it was not of sufficient strength to influence results very much. The adoption of the free silver plank by the democrats assembled in national convention at Chicago in the preceding summer had caused United States Senator Caffery, of New Orleans, to leave the convention and join the other bolters at Indianapolis. Here, as permanent chairman, he presided over the convention that organized the national democratic party with its gold standard platform.⁵³ His course of action was displeasing to country democrats in Louisiana, many of whom felt called upon to lecture him as to what constituted sound democratic doctrine. Some went so far as to

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 137.

⁵⁰ *Times-Democrat*, September 5, 1896.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, September 16, 24, 25, 26, 1896.

⁵² *Ibid.*, September 27, 1896.

⁵³ Stanwood, *History of the presidency*, 558.

demand his expulsion from congress.⁵⁴ Upon his return to his home he took an active part in forming the national democratic party of Louisiana, its membership being composed almost entirely of residents of New Orleans, the business and financial center of the state.⁵⁵ The republicans tried to enter into a fusion agreement with the national democrats, but they refused for the reason, as Senator Caffery stated, that they were democrats and believed in democratic principles.⁵⁶

Great interest was taken in the election, which was held November 3, although with the democrats and populists fused the result was a foregone conclusion. The republicans could not muster sufficient votes, even with the sugar planters, to overcome the combination, and the gold democrats were merely a handful. The popular vote of the state for president was 77,175 for Bryan, 22,037 for McKinley, while Palmer, the national democratic candidate, received but 1,915.⁵⁷ "We have had exciting campaigns before, but nothing like the present one, not even in the ugly days which immediately followed the Civil War," ran an editorial in the *Times-Democrat* while the contest was at its height, and it remarked that it was gratifying that New Orleans and Louisiana were escaping the extreme bitterness that characterized the campaign elsewhere.⁵⁸ Election day passed quietly.

The election for deciding whether or not a constitutional convention should be held, subject to the conditions laid down in the act of July 7, 1896, took place January 11, 1898, and resulted in a vote of 36,178 for, and only 7,578 against the proposition. The convention, accordingly, met at the appointed time and place. Nearly all the delegates were democrats, there being present only a few republicans and one populist, B. W. Bailey of Winn parish.⁵⁹ The result of their work was the Louisiana constitution of 1898, which is remarkable for its elaborate provisions regulating suffrage and elections. Ignorant voters were to be excluded unless they owned and paid taxes on property

⁵⁴ *Times-Democrat*, September 21, 1896.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, September 11, 22, 23, 1896.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, October 3, 1896.

⁵⁷ Stanwood, *History of the presidency*, 567.

⁵⁸ October 26, 1896.

⁵⁹ *Biennial report of the secretary of state of the state of Louisiana to the general assembly*, 1896-1898, opposite p. 32.

assessed at three hundred dollars or over. The most important clause in this connection, section 5 of article 197, provided that "no male person who was on January 1, 1867, or at any date prior thereto, entitled to vote under the Constitution or statutes of any state of the United States, wherein he then resided, and no son or grandson of any such person not less than twenty-one years of age at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, and no male person of foreign birth, who was naturalized prior to the first day of January, 1898, shall be denied the right to register and vote in this State by reason of his failure to possess the educational or property qualifications prescribed by this Constitution: provided he shall have resided in this State for five years next preceding the date at which he shall apply for registration, and shall have registered in accordance with the terms of this article prior to September 1, 1898, but no person shall be entitled to register under this section after said date." This is the famous "grandfather clause," the first of its kind; by inventing and adopting it Louisiana showed the other southern states how to disfranchise the negroes without interfering with the white voters. Two other constitutional changes merit attention: the governor was made ineligible as his own successor, and limitations were placed upon his power of appointment by making the important state officers elective.

The presidential election of 1896 marked the beginning of the end of populism in Louisiana; from that time on the third party men gradually returned to the democratic organization. This was probably due in part to reviving prosperity, but the fact that the electoral law of 1896 and the constitutional convention of 1898 had redressed most of their local grievances should not be overlooked. The people's party had a candidate for governor in the state election of 1900, Donelson Caffery, son of Senator Caffery, but they gave him only 4,938 votes. He failed to carry a single parish; even Winn went democratic. The election was a sweeping victory for the democrats; they elected their candidate for governor, William W. Heard, and every member of the legislature.⁶⁰ The populists never put a ticket in the field after 1900.

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

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⁶⁰ *Report of the secretary of state to his excellency W. W. Heard, governor of the state of Louisiana, May 12, 1902, 564.*